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BRIEFING

WHAT'S WRONG WITH U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

The problems that plague the intelligence community are so deeply rooted that only fundamental changes can improve performance



BY ALLAN E. GOODMAN

The recent campaign for the White House marked the third straight presidential election in which the American intelligence community's performance was a major issue.

From their respective sides, President Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski all left office thinking intelligence had not served them well.

Moreover, ever since the debate in Iran the Senate and House Select Committees on Intelligence have been sharply critical of the retrospective briefings they have received from the intelligence agencies.

too fragmented. Sophisticated collection technologies have actually impeded the sharing of information. And rival agencies in stiff competition for financing prepare such divergent analyses that the system fails to provide enough accuracy, timeliness, or complete information to policy makers.

Unfortunately, such problems have plagued the intelligence community for more than a decade and are so deeply rooted that only fundamental changes to the system will improve performance.

Intelligence Failures

The quality of intelligence provided by the community has been seriously questioned for some time. There have been at least 30 alleged intelligence failures investigated by Congress or the press since 1980.

also bungled the execution of the origins and intentions of the Soviet combat brigade "discovered" in Cuba in 1979. Such misjudgments have all been extremely costly to U.S. security. Some of these failures led to major crises, like the Cuban missile crisis, others, such as the underestimation of the Soviet nuclear buildup, led to complacency about America's own arsenal and the need to modernize it.

U.S. intelligence agencies also have failed to anticipate military attacks and to identify tactics and targets in limited wars. The intelligence community has rarely predicted correctly the use of force by one state to achieve its aims over another.

These failures include the North Korean attack on South Korea in 1960; the risk to the USS

Liberty of Israeli air attack if the ship continued a surveillance mission during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; the risk to the USS Pueblo of nuclear surveillance activities near North Korean waters in 1968; the objective of the Tet offensive in Vietnam in 1968, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war; the Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) and the subsequent British making of the Argentine cruiser Belgrano; and the efforts by Iran and Iraq to destroy each other's oil fields and export facilities once the Persian Gulf war broke out.

In each of these cases, ill-conceived or mistaken policy also was at fault. But to blame the policy makers for the failures, as many intelligence professionals have done, would be a serious mistake.

However, the policy-makers

reached their conclusions, they were guided by faulty intelligence analysis or poorly served by the slow or incomplete dissemination of reports by the intelligence community.

The Iran Debacle

The most badly debated intelligence failure of the 1980s was the Iran debacle. Actually, a number of failures along with a vacillating policy toward the shah led to the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in November 1979 and destroyed vital American economic and security interests in the region.

To be sure, as the commentators who compiled the CIA's postmortem on Iran later discovered, not a single person in or out of government forecast the success of Ayatollah Khomeini. Revolutionaries have

rarely been predicted accurately, but U.S. intelligence agencies and their analysts failed even to guess this.

The episode around Jimmy Carter is one of the defining moments in the history of the intelligence community. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Brzezinski, and then director of Central Intelligence, Admiral Brentnall, Thorne

"To Cy, Zieg, Brent — I am not satisfied with the quality of our political intelligence. James Vance was not, and, as much as possible, I am going to make a report concerning our deficiencies in the most important areas of the world. Make a joint recommendation on what we should do to improve your ability to give us political information and advice."

At the senior level, new priorities

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When Pressure Forces a CIA Officer to Quit



BY JOHN HORTON

pressure came from the director himself.

Nothing will get an intelligence officer's back up faster than a staff of that kind of pressure. In the end, it is a matter of principle that he not stand intelligence judgments to make them more palatable to his superiors or to show the glory of approval on an administration's policies.

A National Intelligence Estimate is not simply an intelligence report or a bit of analysis, nor should it be any one man's opinion. It is the product of the deliberation of representatives of all the intelligence agencies dealing with foreign affairs.

As a member of the National Intelligence Council, the national intelligence officer chairs the writing of the estimate. This may give him more influence than one of the representatives from CIA, Defense, State or Army or Navy or Air Force or the Marine, or from the Defense Intelligence Agency. It may not.

But the remark should reflect the views of all the agencies and differences in view often. It is not a shield that he blindly would not, and it should reflect doubt as well as disagreement.

In 1978, a distinguished intelligence officer, in testifying before the Senate, spoke of the "natural tension" between intelligence officers and policy-makers and said, "Policy-makers must assume the integrity of the intelligence provided and avoid attempts to get materials suited to their tastes."

Much has been said — and no doubt more will be said — about the motives of policy-makers for distorting or distorting the intelligence they receive. The point to understand is to accept it that this has happened in the

past, and it can be expected in the future.

Strong-minded officials often think they know better than intelligence officers. Attempts to squish dissenting intelligence reports or judgments that don't back up an administration's policies have a non-partisan prevalence.

William Casey, the current director, most differs from previous directors of central intelligence in that he is a part of the policy-making group where Central America is involved as much as he is the president's chief intelligence officer. His particular case has led to talk of a bill to ensure the selection of future directors from the career service to prevent "politicians" being put in the job.

That may appeal to intelligence officers who have an unhealthy respect for our own virtue, but no legislation can ensure that a director, no matter how experienced in our work, will not buckle under pressure.

We should face the expectation that even men of good will and integrity may be inconsistent of conviction as they consider to be wrong or inaccurate. A taste of power may make us arrogant. The natural tension will continue.

If we accept this as inevitable, our aim should be to reduce the tension. I propose that we do so through a loose, informal council of elders — a tribal council — to act as the public conscience, where intelligence matters, define real differences and increase the arms of consensus that comes so far from our grasp today.

This council would sit with the director when he is being pressed by the politicians, hold him back when impulsive impulses

him from the path of duty, and talk quietly with other parties to see if the differences be minor or major and to sound warnings if the risks to be too great to work the course.

The council would be made up of members of the four different organizations already charged with the task of examining the performance of the intelligence community and of the CIA in particular.

In the CIA there is an Office of the Inspector General that reports the agency and acts as ombudsman for employee complaints. The President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board is made up of private citizens appointed by the president.

Two other organizations charged with oversight of the intelligence community are the Senate and House Intelligence Committees. The informal exchange of information and views among these groups would provide an immediate improvement.

What would begin as a pragmatic approach to supporting the integrity of the intelligence process could benefit from the participation of officials from State, from Defense.

Good intelligence is vital to our security. Our decisions of foreign and defense policy affect us gravely from partisan exaggerations and misstatements. Such a tribal council could bridge over party chasms, define real differences and increase the arms of consensus that comes so far from our grasp today.

John Horton was a CIA operations officer from 1948 to 1975 and served on the National Intelligence Council from May 1983 to May 1984.

GREAT DECISIONS '85

Starting Next Week

While you mark the start of the Great Decisions program, sponsored annually by the Foreign Policy Association, next week is the beginning of the Great Decisions program, which consists of eight weekly meetings in community television stations in discussion of significant U.S. foreign policy issues.

Starting next week, subject material related to the weekly Great Decisions topic will run in the briefing section. The subject for discussion the first week will be "Revolutionary Cuba: Toward Accommodation or Confrontation?"

Great Decisions '85 is sponsored jointly by the World Affairs Council of Northern California in cooperation with the Foreign Policy Association, a non-governmental, non-partisan organization devoted to stimulating citizen participation in world affairs.

Participants in Great Decisions will receive their views in opinion polls distributed in the weekly meetings. The polls will be tabulated and distributed to members of Congress and the executive branch.

Discussion groups are still being formed and telephone reservations for the weekly lectures are being accepted. Information on Great Decisions '85 can be obtained from the World Affairs Council, 2850 Sutter Street, Suite 202, S.F., 94115, phone 865-8641.

How to Improve U.S. Intelligence

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Lies were set for political intelligence in 40 countries whose stability was judged directly to affect major American interests.

The group recommended more resources to hire expert political analysts — not collectors — and decreed greater coordination in the collection of political intelligence between the Foreign Service and the intelligence community.

The only tangible result achieved by the group, however, was a substantial expansion of reporting requirements that fell largely on clandestine collectors because the Foreign Service was not given the staff resources to respond.

During his 1980 presidential campaign Reagan pledged to make improved intelligence one of his top priorities. Once elected, he appointed his campaign manager William Casey as director of central intelligence.

Politics and the CIA

Casey moved decisively and rapidly to bring in his own team to reorganize the analytic part of the CIA along geographic lines, to parallel the organization of the operations directorate, and to substantially increase the National Foreign Intelligence Program budget.

According to a Jan. 16, 1983, New York Times Magazine report by Philip Taubman, the CIA is the fastest-growing major federal agency. Its 25 percent budget increase in fiscal year 1983 exceeded even the Pentagon budget's 18 percent growth that year.

Although the intelligence budget's size is classified, Taubman quotes congressional sources as pegging the cost of annual CIA operations at more than \$1.5 billion.

In his exhaustive 1983 study, "The Puzzle Palace," James Bamford reports that estimates of the supsecret National Security Agency's budget run "as high as \$10 billion."

Yet little improvement is apparent with respect to the accuracy of the intelligence community's product.

Charges of intelligence failures have surfaced over estimates of the Soviet military buildup, the accuracy of arms-control monitoring, the threat against the U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut, the ability of the Lebanese army, the nature and extent of the Cuban presence in Grenada, and the likely outcome of elections in El Salvador, as well as that country's domestic politics in general.

Another major congressional public concern has been the politicization of the position of the



CIA Director William Casey

CIA director in the Reagan administration.

The appointment of Casey and his elevation to cabinet status have put the intelligence community deeply into the policymaking arena.

In the atmosphere of a National Security Council meeting, the cabinet room, and the Oval Office itself, the central intelligence director can be tempted, if not basically inclined, to take sides and to express a policy preference.

Yet the temptation is an important one to resist, especially for the president's sake. As the president's principal adviser, only the CIA director can provide the security council with assessments independent of policy preferences.

Report on Lebanon

The trend today at the CIA and elsewhere in the intelligence community is to tailor the product to the needs and nuances of policy debate.

As one senior intelligence officer said in an interview, "Casey comes back here from the White House looking for reports to buttress his stand. He does not ask us for a review of an issue or a situation. He wants material he can use to persuade his colleagues, justify controversial policy, or expand the agency's involvement in covert action."

A case in point is Lebanon. Casey repeatedly returned drafts of one National Intelligence Estimate for revision with the notation "try again."

Many analysts think Casey was dissatisfied with the National Intelligence Estimate's conclusion that the government of Lebanese Presi-

dent Amin Gemayel, and especially its army, were not viable and that they would not be significantly strengthened by a U.S. Marine presence.

Charges that reports have been altered have also surfaced in connection with the CIA's work on Central and South America. Two senior analysts resigned recently claiming that Casey ordered their findings to be rewritten to inflate the threat to U.S. security.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., has asked the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to conduct a thorough evaluation of their allegations. "If accurate," Byrd said in a letter to the committee's vice chairman, "these reports indicate there has been a shocking misuse of the CIA for political purposes."

In addition, the Senate select committee has repeatedly expressed "concern" about whether Casey would keep the committee "fully and currently informed of all intelligence activities."

These anxieties proved well-founded when it was revealed by the New York Times that the CIA had launched a covert action to mine the harbors of Nicaragua without adequately briefing the committee.

Unfortunately, some of these problems are not new. Policy-makers constantly seek intelligence to support their policies and frequently encourage the CIA director to provide it. And intelligence officials have always tried to tell congressional oversight committees as little as possible, especially regarding covert operations.

One fundamental problem is that the current reporting system

discourages analysts and agencies from sharing information. Consequently, when collectors or analysts in one part of the community find new data that challenge conventional wisdom, their first instinct is to acquire them away.

What Is Needed

The immediate need is for an overhaul of the analytic career service and production process that will correct patterns of thinking and of management that have contributed to past intelligence failures.

A central, community-wide foreign-intelligence data base should be created to assure that an analyst working on a specific problem would have access to all the information collected.

Analysts also should be provided with incentives to do more reflective writing and research. Work and travel abroad should be facilitated and a thorough, substantive review procedure for all products and publications should be developed. These steps would greatly improve the accuracy and quality of the intelligence product.

Analysts must also pay more attention to distinguishing between what they know and do not know, to identifying judgments based on specific evidence vs. those based on speculation, and to making projections about the future.

Reorganizing the way U.S. intelligence services collect, analyze and disseminate the knowledge essential for national decision-making should be a high priority.

In particular, a return to the concept of central intelligence collection and analysis would help improve the performance of both tasks. Such centralization, along with the separation of collectors from analysts, would break down agency-erected barriers to the badly needed sharing of all information.

Thus the United States should establish a central collection agency, able to command and mix human and technical intelligence collectors to use each most effectively.

Also needed is a central agency for research and analysis where, again, the best talent can be employed to work on a problem in as much depth as required. These two agencies should replace the CIA, NSA, and other intelligence organizations.

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Excerpted from the Winter issue of Foreign Policy magazine. Allan E. Goodman served in several senior staff positions in the Central Intelligence Agency from 1975 to 1980, including presidential briefing coordinator of central intelligence. He is associate dean of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.